In recent years, natural gas production from conventional resources has continued to decline, but production from unconventional resources such as coal beds, tight gas sands, and particularly from natural gas shales has increased.

These are in regions—such as the Northeast—that are not traditionally thought of as gas-producing States. In fact, expanded drilling in tight gas sands and gas shales helped increase total U.S. gas production by about 9 percent in 2008 after a decade of its being roughly constant.

We also have natural gas reserves, particularly off our coasts, that have yet to be fully explored.

Now, let me be clear in that I do not support drilling for gas anywhere and everywhere. I believe certain areas, both on and offshore, should be placed off limits to development.

But we also need to take advantage of this domestic resource and develop some of these resources in an environmentally friendly way. That is why, during consideration of the clean energy bill in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I supported Senator DORGAN's efforts to open up the Eastern Gulf of Mexico to development.

Between recent discoveries of new domestic natural gas reserves and untapped reserves offshore, natural gas can continue to be a vital energy source for our country. The latest estimates indicate that we have enough reserves to sustain our current consumption rate for almost 100 years—and that is without new technology development or new reserve discoveries.

It is also important to understand how natural gas interacts with other energy sources, particularly renewable energy, like wind and solar. Many here in the Senate know that I am a strong proponent of a national renewable electricity standard, or RES. Colorado already has a State RES and it has been very successful in both increasing our use of renewable energy sources and bringing new jobs to our State. However, renewable energy sources alone will not be enough to fulfill our country's energy needs, especially in the short term, and electricity powered by natural gas will play a critical role in adjusting to the variability of renewable energy generation.

We can take these steps to decrease our carbon emissions and promote our domestic energy sources without increased energy costs for consumers. New natural gas combined-cycle plants are competitive with new coal plants. Natural gas plants have lower capital costs and shorter construction times than coal-fired powerplants. For example, the National Academies of Sciences recently released a report ''America's Energy Future: Technology and Transformation'' as part of a comprehensive look at our energy policy. The report found that, at a price of $6 per million Btu, natural gas plants have the lowest lifetime cost of electricity of comparable energy source.

While there has been concern in recent years over price fluctuation in the natural gas market, the Energy Information Administration projects that prices will range from $6 to $9 per million Btu or lower for natural gas for decades.

Yet natural gas is not just for producing electricity. Clean natural gas is already being used as an alternative fuel for vehicles. Developing a stronger and wider market for natural gas vehicles will reduce our dependency on foreign oil, create jobs, and benefit the environment.

As of 2006, there were about 116,000 compressed natural gas vehicles and about 3,000 liquefied natural gas vehicles in the United States. About two-thirds of these natural gas vehicles are passenger vehicles.

The benefits of creating a natural gas fuel system akin to the current petroleum system would be immediate. Average consumers would save about $800 in fuel costs by switching to natural gas. And, again, not only is natural gas cheaper for powering vehicles but it would also emit fewer greenhouse gases than gasoline vehicles and natural gas could be produced domestically.

These facts seem almost too good to be true, but they are just that: facts. What we need now is to invest in natural gas and support creating a viable natural gas vehicle industry.

So natural gas—a clean, domestic fuel source that powers mature technology—is already a force in our electricity market and is a growing factor in our transportation system. Yet the current—the bill that the House passed does not include appropriate encouragement for this energy source.

As I work with my colleagues here to pass clean energy legislation this year, I will continue to push for incentives for natural gas powered electricity and clean natural gas vehicles. America—and Colorado—can become the world leader in clean energy, exporting our expertise, intellectual property, and products worldwide, just as we have done repeatedly throughout our history. With our budding renewable energy industry and strong support for traditional energy sources, Colorado has a tremendous opportunity to lead the clean energy revolution, and I do not want us to miss it. But that means we must take action now and that is why we need to get clean energy legislation passed this year.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING THOMAS MAROVICH, JR.

● Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the life of Thomas M. Marovich, Jr. This brave man lost his life while working to protect Californians from a forest fire.

On July 21, 2009, Thomas Marovich died during a rappel proficiency training exercise while he was assigned as an apprentice with the Chester Helitack Crew fighting the Backbone Fire in Humboldt County. He was 20 years old.

Those who knew Thomas recall that, since childhood, his dream was to become a firefighter. When he was a student at James Logan High School in Union City, he was honored as Student of the Year in the regional fire technology program. Shortly thereafter, he began his firefighting service as a member of the Cadet Program for the Fremont Fire Department at the age of 17 and became an emergency medical technician, EMT, by 18. He was hired on as a firefighter for the Modoc National Forest in the Big Valley Ranger District in Adin, CA, after working as a volunteer while completing basic fire training. In 2008, after two fire seasons, he was hired as a Wildland firefighter apprentice to train for fire management. Thomas is survived by his parents, sister, and three grandparents.

Thomas Marovich, like all those who fight fires across California, put his life on the line to protect our communities. My heart goes out to his family and loved ones and my thoughts and prayers are with them. We are forever indebted to him for his courage, service, and sacrifice.●

COMMENDING WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

● Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, today I wish to honor the members of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, WASP, hailing from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who have recently received our Nation's highest civilian award—the Congressional Gold Medal. Joan Frost, Julia Jordan, Ruth Kunkle, Eleanor Lawry, Kristin Lent, Barbara Posey, Florence Reynolds, and Lillian Yonally exemplify hard work, courage, and commitment to their country.

The WASP were the first female pilots in America's Armed Forces. They were stationed at 120 Army air bases across America, from where they flew approximately 60 million miles in less than 2 years and in a variety of aircraft. Over 25,000 women applied to the program, a select 1,800 went through basic training, and 1,074 women graduated.

The contributions of these brave women to the success of the United States in WW II cannot be minimized, and I am truly proud that several of these extraordinary women called Pennsylvania home. To each of these women, I would like to say thank you for your contribution to aviation. By going against convention, you broke important barriers and are the reason why female pilots fly in every type of aircraft and mission, including combat sorties, today.

I am sure that each time a young person sees a black-and-white photo of a young smiling female pilot leaning out the window of her B–26 Marauder,